

VZCZCXRO8474
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #0348 0671225
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 071225Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1233
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 3165
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2512
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3733
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2029
RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA PRIORITY

UNCLAS BEIRUT 000348

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ELA - SOMERSET, NEA/PPD, R, INR/R/MR
INR-PARENT
PASS TO USAID
SECDEF FOR OASD/PA
LONDON/POL
PARIS/POL

WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
USCENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [OPRC](#) [KPAO](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: Lebanon: Media Coverage -- USAID Projects in the South

11. Summary: Under the title "Forbidden Assistance," a Lebanese magazine "Southern Issues" (Shu'un Jannubiah) carried a ten-page report on the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Lebanon's assistance to southern Lebanon, the area where Hizballah, a designated terrorist organization, holds sway. The report included an interview with USAID/Lebanon director, Raouf Youssef, in addition to a description of USAID projects being implemented by various nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners. The articles were accompanied by color photographs and a map showing project locations. The cover photograph was taken in the USAID director's office and showed the U.S. and Lebanese flags flanking the USAID emblem. End Summary.

Description of the Magazine

12. The title for this issue, "Forbidden Assistance," is directed at Hizballah, which has consistently forbidden its own Shi'a Muslim community members to accept assistance from U.S. sources.

13. "Southern Issues" was established in January 2002 by USAID; AMIDEAST was the implementing partner. At the time, AMIDEAST was focusing on "Transparency and Accountability," which mirrored the magazine's purpose to focus on southern Lebanese issues objectively and transparently. Following USAID/AMIDEAST funding and assistance, the magazine received a grant from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which is a NGO working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. When the NDI grant ended, the magazine received funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which is also a NGO working to strengthen democratic institutions around the world. The magazine receives an annual grant from NED which covers about 60 percent of its expenses.

14. The "Southern Issues" magazine has approximately 700 subscribers, sells between 300 to 400 issues, and distributes about 500 issues for free per month; it has a total monthly circulation of 11500. Its thirty-five staff members receive symbolic wages, i.e., they are essentially volunteers. The magazine headquarters were originally in Beirut's southern suburb and were totally destroyed in the July 2006 war. The new headquarters are near the "Rafiq Hariri

International Airport" in Beirut. The two founders of the magazine, Ali Al-Amin and Kassem Kassir, are considered moderate Shi'a, who are credible, and are known for their open-mindedness and objective criticism of Hizballah.

Articles on USAID Assistance

¶4. The issue started by noting that USAID assistance is from the American to the Lebanese people. The many implementing NGOs and the scope of the projects were discussed. The issue emphasized that USAID's assistance is unconditional and immediate with no political bias. Two hundred and twenty southern Lebanese municipalities have benefited so far from USAID assistance; and, approximately forty percent of USAID's assistance focuses on southern Lebanon. One article noted that some southerners did not benefit from USAID assistance as they refused it for political reasons. The issue highlighted various projects and described them, for example, the restoration of partially destroyed homes and Tyre's historic fort, assistance to fishermen, and economic growth projects assisting the victims and the families of victims of landmines.

¶5. Comment: This issue of "Southern Affairs" is one of the many success stories Public Diplomacy (PD) Beirut is assisting in generating through its efforts to promote U.S. activities throughout Lebanon. USAID projects are a concrete manifestation of the U.S. Government's support to Lebanon. End Comment.

Sison